DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 295 436 FL 016 610

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TITLE The Wall Street Journal Report: Basis for a Model Program in Business English.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 17p.; In: Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages for Business and the Professions (see FL 016 586).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business English; Discourse Analysis; English (Second Language); *English for Special Purposes; Higher Education; Media Selection; *Periodicals; Second Language Instruction; *Television; Vocabulary Development
IDENTIFIERS *Wall Street Journal Report

ABSTRACT

One successful model for instruction in English as a second language (ESL) takes its core texts from a single recurring publication or broadcast. The use of one periodical maximizes the opportunity to become familiar with the format, topics, and common story genres or scripts. Script theory, which views texts as answers to predictable questions based on script type, builds on the predictable periodical format. In the case of one business ESL course, the periodical used is the weekly business-related television program, the Wall Street Journal Report (WSJR). The program's structure is consistent, and the different types of scripts give predictable kinds of content that can be analyzed in class. The students, with the teacher's guidance, can help select the segments to be used in class, and can be required to look for related texts from other sources. The finding and synthesizing of other texts is an active and rewarding learning task for the students. The headline for each story can be used for discussion of the text's focus or perspective, and vocabulary learning can be organized by script type, topic, or attitude conveyed (e.g., tentativeness or controversial nature of the topic). These texts are also good sources of idioms. (MSE)

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# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL REPORT: BASIS FOR A MODEL PROGRAM IN BUSINESS ENGLISH

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## A RESOURCE PERIODICAL

Second language programs in Business English need to be timely, efficient and appropriate in the materials and methods selected for the business professionals who often must learn another language in a relatively short time. One successful model for an ESL program (English as a Second Language) selects the core texts from a single recurring publication or broadcast. In this paper we have selected material from The Wall Street Journal Report (WSJR), a weekly television program, to illustrate the model.

The core text or "resource periodical" can be any regularly occurring newspaper, television program, magazine, or radio program which contains material relevant to the interests and experiences of the language learner. The resource periodical can also be a journal, newsletter, or series of monthly reports (but not a single report). The use of only one periodical maximizes the opportunity to become familiar with the format, the topics, and, most importantly, the frequently used story genres, or scripts as we have labeled them. The learner may choose to emphasize different perspectives of a single text or to pursue different texts depending on his/her needs and interests at a given time. When individual students have questions, other students will consider the comments relevant because they usually remember having seen or skimmed the text in question. They may even have noted the same problem area.

The WSJR is a particularly appropriate resource periodical for multicultural groups for at least three reasons. First, the business oriented topics are discussed from several business perspectives, yet each segment contains sufficient background information for those who have not previously been introduced to the topics. Second, especially in the

opening segments of the program, the visual clues to the oral text make guessing natural and productive when concepts or vocabulary expressions are unknown. Third, the length of the segments allows listeners to become familiar with the development of the text, yet the three to five minute segments, complete in themselves, can be repeated for different listening purposes and still allow sufficient time for discussion in a class.

If we leave aside commercials, the WSJR appears to consist of at least four regular and recognizable segments. These four segments are: "The First Front Page," "The Second Front Page," "Money Matters," and "Market Watch." "The First Front Page" is the week's major story. It is a longer segment, about five minutes in length and endeavors to provide background to some issue currently in the business news. "The Second Front Page" often consists of a profile of some person in the news and then moves on to explain why the person is in the news. The third section, "Money Matters," provides background information for people controlling their own investments. This segment provides short, clear definitions for study. Also, the pros and cons of various investment decisions are explored. The fourth segment, "Market Watch," follows (sometimes predicts) the week's developments in the stock market. While it is interesting, the brevity of the reports coupled with the complexity of the stock market makes this segment less useful for the Business ESL class than the segments that precede. Finally, we should point out that the WSJR begins with useful headlines of the week's stories backed by video clips. Together these prepare students to recognize when the action has shifted from one segment to another. These headlines also function as "script activators," a subject we shall return to below.

SCRIPTS

Most of the news stories on the WSJR can be classified under one of a small number of story genres that we are calling scripts. Some of these script titles are as follows: Problem, Decision, Innovation, Profile, Trend, and Forecast. Scripts have a stereotypic content structure consisting of several predictable chunks of information or categories of content, as we prefer to call them. For example, the script labeled Forecast appears to have the following categories of content: Prediction - this states the topic and indicates whether the prediction is an expected trend (comparative) or an event (non-comparative). Time, which can be specific or non-specific, gives the period the prediction covers. Source identifies the person/group making the prediction and establishes credentials. Basis gives evidence and perhaps some indication of its reliability. Range indicates people/things affected if the prediction comes true. Reassessment addresses any change from an earlier prediction, and, finally, Modification has to do with factors that might either prevent/ensure, strengthen/weaken the prediction. Long forecast stories will often have all of these categories; short forecasts will usually have only the first four or five.

These stereotypic categories of content not only make up the structure of the forecast script; we believe that they also exist as part of the knowledge that adults have about forecasts. That is, given only the prediction that the economy will be good and the requirement that the prediction is of interest, a series of questions that match up with several categories will arise in the minds of many listeners. (At this point the reader might pause to reflect upon the questions that come to his/her mind concerning the italicized prediction.) Possible questions are as follows:

What period is covered by the prediction/When will the prediction take place? (Time); Who made the prediction? What are the qualifications of that person or group? (Source); What evidence is the prediction based on? (Basis); Who/what will be affected if the prediction comes true? (Range); How does this prediction differ from earlier predictions on the same topic? (Reassessment); and What factors could alter the prediction? (Modification).

It would be a mistake to believe that what we have here is nothing more than the Who What Where When and Why of a news story. These question words by themselves do not distinguish one script from another; furthermore, they do not cover all categories of content. It is precisely the categories of content found within texts and the concomitant questions that exist in the minds of listeners that distinguish one script from another.

At this point it should be mentioned that we are not interested in proposing a rigorous theoretical model for the structure of news stories. Rather, we are only suggesting a method of dealing with unfamiliar texts in a spontaneous way. We have transcribed the video text that we plan to examine only in order to aid us in discussing our approach. What is required of the teacher is not that he/she transcribe video texts but that he/she be able to identify different scripts and their categories of content. To state the matter differently, the teacher's main task is to help the language learner develop his/her own strategies of listening (and reading) by anticipating answers to questions.

It is not unusual for scripts to combine to form the basis of news stories. For example, a news story might be based on a Decision script and a Problem script, or a Decision script and an Innovation script, as is the

case in the following news story, one we have chosen to examine in some detail (See Appendix for complete text.)

The categories of content associated with a Decision script include at least the following: The Decision itself, Agent (the person or group responsible for the decision), Affected (persons affected or potentially affected by the decision), Pro (those who support the decision), and Con (those who oppose). Obviously there will be overlap between Affected and Pro/Con; nevertheless, the distinction is worth keeping. Categories of content associated with Innovation include at least the following: the Innovation itself, Process (the mechanics of the innovation), Application, Advantages, Disadvantages, and Beneficiaries. Here the reader might reflect upon the questions that come to mind if he/she were told first that an important decision had been made, and then second that a significant innovation now existed.

The main segments of the WSJR are introduced by spoken headlines or script activators that set up a series of expectations in the listener, expectations that can be stated in the form of questions. In the script at hand, the script activator prepares the listener for a decision story--"The government is giving the green light to preserving meat, fruit, and vegetables with radiation"--and hints that innovation might be involved--"...you'll soon be able to eat like astronauts."

At this point we would like to suggest an analysis for only a few lines at the beginning of the news story. For an analysis of the entire story, using the categories of content listed above, the reader should examine the text in the Appendix, which has the categories of content noted at the appropriate places in the text. We do not feel compelled to account for every piece of information in the text. Our goal is to account for

only the more salient pieces. We wish to show that the approach that views a text as answers to predictable questions does indeed account for most of the information. By including a complete written text and suggested analysis for illustration, we do not wish to mislead readers. We wish to underline that in the classroom it is the process of developing appropriate questions from the script activator and seeking answers in the oral segments (radio or video) or written discourse (magazines or newspapers) that should be the main activity. Teachers have to forsake the usual security of prepared transcripts and prepared questions. True, not everything will be understood; not everything will be discussed, but learning to tolerate some ambiguity and unintelligibility is one of the strategies needed by second language learners.

The first line of the story states the Agent for the Decision; then lines 2 and 3 give the Decision and mention the Innovation. (See Appendix.) Line 3 also states the Application and lines 4-9 give Advantages and Disadvantages of the innovation. Lines 10 and 11 state Beneficiaries as does line 13. Lines 14-16 again state Disadvantage. (Many categories of content are instantiated more than once in a story.) Lines 16-18 state Application, etc.

The reader may not agree entirely with the analysis given in the Appendix; however, he/she will agree with most of what we have done if our approach has validity. As we pointed out above, most texts are combinations of more than one script. The script that is chosen by the reader/listener influences the way the information is understood. Thus we note that some parts of the text have dual roles so to speak. For example, the statement (line 57): "That kind of massive use of irradiation alarms consumer groups..." fulfills the role of Disadvantage in the Innovation

script and Con in the Decision script. This double role is not a contradiction but an instance of the multiple functions of language. Such multiple functioning is found in authentic language use and should be noted and discussed.

## PARTICIPATION AND AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

For many teachers, the primary obstacle to using timely, authentic material in the classroom is their perceived need to do extensive preparation. This preparation usually consists of time spent on selection of material, choice of key words and concepts, exercise material such as drills and discussion questions, and most likely some form of measurement. If all the decisions necessary for a class to run smoothly - what to teach, how to teach, and how to test - are embodied in the usual preparation by the teacher, what is left for the students to decide is rather superficial and insignificant. There is literally no reason to participate in class.

If, however, the material for the class is selected from the texts in a resource periodical, then each learner can contribute to the selection. Furthermore, if the teacher acts more as a chairman of the group and suggests ways to make the selection, some surprising benefits accrue.

The use of several issues of a single periodical throughout a course provides a consistent view of its audience (listeners/readers) and allows learners to develop a sense of confidence and familiarity with the topics, approach, and language used. The content, in this case business, should be as close as possible to the level of specialization that the learners would be able to understand in their own language. Ideally, the periodical should contain the kind of material the learners will need to be able to utilize in their business transactions in the second language. At least some of the topics should have general or on-going relevance to the

professionals in the group--at least to some of the people some of the time. When an appropriate periodical is chosen, the selection of which text to pursue can easily be determined by the group on the spot, so to speak. The discussion of reasons for choosing one text versus another also provide excellent, useful, involved language exercise. Students can be quite articulate when they realize that what they say does make a difference. On the other hand, teachers can be quite flexible when they realize that they can teach whatever language strategies they want regardless of the text that is chosen.

The use of the periodical should be similar to the use that a typical business reader/listener would make of the material; not the use a language learner typically makes of a text. Readers/listeners tend to pay attention only to those segments that interest them in some way. Not every part is considered equally important or useful. Readers/listeners tend to read about/listen to the topics they already know something about and to read/listen for answers to questions or solutions to problems. Consequently, a reader or listener who approaches material with some purpose is predisposed to stop paying attention when he/she is convinced that he/she has enough information for his/her purpose or convinced that the information will not be relevant to his/her purpose.

The content of current periodicals frequently centers on topics actively being discussed by professional peers and the general media. Learners are easily encouraged to further explore the topic (and incidentally re-encounter the language) in slightly different contexts and, importantly, in different modes. Thus, if the basic text is oral (as in our illustration), learners should be encouraged to look for related written texts. Non-academic business language learners appear to enjoy

using such popular guides as the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature and the various newspaper indices that are now available. Academics continue to benefit from access to the standard business journals. The food irradiation topic turned up many pamphlets and other written texts. One relatively short, eight-paragraph text "Food Irradiation expected to get FDA approval" in The Wall Street Journal (November 27, 1985, p. 6) added several bits of new information to the categories developed by the group after viewing the WSJR tape. The new information expanded the knowledge of the innovative process, i.e., "The radiation ... kills insects and bacteria by disrupting the cellular makeup", the labeling alternatives--a two year trial with both symbol and statement and the statement with and without the qualifier "to preserve food", the negative effect on food--foods lose vitamins, the effect of radiation on mice, and even a previously unmentioned motivation for allowing the process to be used: "...an effort to protect nuclear weapons production from criticism by linking it to peaceful uses." When a language learner finds related text to supplement class discussion, he/she feels he/she has something worthwhile to contribute (or in other words, a reason to use the language). As a person, not as a teacher, J. Zuck recalls her own excitement at being able to contribute a fact learned from the evening television; namely, that food irradiation is already an accepted practice in twenty-two countries. Imagine the effect of a similar contribution on the self-esteem of a normally passive language student! It is this sense of making a contribution that gives focus to both reading/listening and to speaking/writing.

## SCRIPT ACTIVATOR

The headline that comes at the beginning of a radio, TV program, or appears on the title page of a magazine or newspaper, usually tell/s both the general topic and the manner in which it will be developed. In our approach such a headline is called a script activator because it provides the most useful organizational suggestion on how to proceed.

In the food irradiation text, the activator indicates that a decision, and, most likely, an innovation, will be the focus of the text. Before watching the video (or reading the written text if one is working, say, with a newspaper) the group should discuss decisions and what they know about them. Put some questions and terminology on the blackboard as contributed by the students when they discuss some decision they made such as the decision to learn English. Then word the questions more abstractly so that they can relate to other kinds of decision such as the one to be found in the text.

It is the script activator that allows a teacher and students to discuss the rhetorical points (as predictable by relevant questions) and gives focus to unpreviewed material. If the teacher has not seen the text beforehand, he/she is more likely to help the students acquire a strategy for dealing with texts than to merely summarize the text as he/she might if he/she had watched it in advance.

## BUILDING VOCABULARY

One the the often cited reasons for avoiding authentic material is the complexity of the seemingly uncontrolled vocabulary. The script approach to the use of an unfamiliar text provides useful limits on what has to be learned. At the outset, we must recognize that words in both the foreign language and the native language are seldom learned the first time they are

encountered. We tend to become increasingly aware of words and begin to construct meanings for them as the words recur in contexts in which the meaning is important to us. Occasionally the reverse is true: We have a meaning in the second culture for which we are just waiting to find the word(s).

When a group examines texts with an eye toward answering the questions posed by a script, vocabulary learning is organized in two ways. First, the words used to discuss specific kinds of questions recur over time. In other words, the vocabulary, words and expressions associated with a decision script will occur so that students can begin to note patterns of words that are used to describe decisions. For example, decisions are controversial or unanimous, tentative or final, expected or unexpected, and, to use a final example, often long-awaited when they are official and involve bureaucracies. A second organizing feature resulting from a script approach helps to indicate which parts of a text are relevant to the categories of content being studied either individually or as a group. In the illustrative text, a business person interested in marketing is likely to be interested in the factors that influence the consumer. The reactions to the decision would be a possible organizing rubric. In fact, after reading about various quoted reactions from potential consumers, a marketing person might organize a survey and obtain some first-hand reactions both from his classmates and from shoppers at a market. Several possibilities for such a survey suggest themselves in this text. What are the reactions to various symbols of radiation or irradiation? What do consumers think about when they see a product which contains the words "treated with radiation"? Does the reaction change when the statement is qualified: "Treated with radiation to preserve freshness."? etc.

While it is obvious that there are many business-oriented idioms in the illustrative text, it would be wasteful to make lists of words that "should" be learned. The expressions that the individual learner has encountered several times before will be noted and even used by him in discussions. Most of the other expressions that he observes for the first time need not even be discussed. Either these expressions will recur (and be that much more familiar) in subsequent contexts or their failure to recur makes obvious the limited usefulness in learning them.

One useful way to learn language strategies encompasses more than the word level and blurs normal linguistic boundaries found in language teaching texts. In the illustrative video periodical the narrator conveys a sense of tentativeness or caution in what he is saying. The claims for the safety of irradiated food are hedged by both aural and grammatical cues. See, for example, line 5 where he uses attribution --"says the FDA"-- to detach himself from the claim. Another example is found in line 37: "But, if the FDA is convinced....". In other words, the controversial nature of the decision encourages the narrator to present his report in a tentative framework. Listeners should note this feature of the discourse and be alerted to it in other reports.

As for vocabulary that is highly relevant to the decision script, we can find three expressions that have substantially the same meaning if we examine both the script activator and the script itself. Learners should look for words that express the decision to permit something: "to give the green light to," "to give the go ahead to," "to approve." It should be noted that vocabulary growth is relatively slow and begins with recognition of familiar words, and then proceeds to group together words with roughly similar meanings and finally allows words to be produced appropriately.

## CONCLUSION

The term periodical was expanded to include all magazines, newspapers, journals, radio programs, and television programs that are published or broadcast regularly with a regular format and changing content. A single periodical which serves as the primary source of authentic texts for a specific language class was called a resource periodical. A periodical serves as a resource periodical when the issues concurrent with the classroom course provide the primary source (though not the only source) of authentic texts around which the course is based. Script theory views written and oral texts as answers to predictable questions based on script type or genre. Scripts theory is suggested as the theoretical model for spontaneous use of authentic texts appearing in the resource periodical. Using a video-typed oral text from the Wall Street Journal Report, we illustrated the theoretical and practical aspects of the script approach.

## APPENDIX

Script Activator: Not everybody can take a ride on the Shuttle, but you'll soon be able to eat like the astronauts. The Government is giving the green light to preserving meat, fruit, and vegetables with radiation.

The Food and Drug Administration (Agent) has given the go-ahead to a scientific process (Decision) that could revolutionize the food industry (Innovation). It preserves food (Application) almost indefinitely without dangerous chemicals (Advantage) and, says the FDA, without harmful side effects (Advantage). The catch: It involves exposing food to high doses of radiation (Disadvantage). That fact, among others, has the Government and the food industry tip-toeing into the brave new world of irradiation.

Last November the shuttle astronauts dined on an irradiated Thanksgiving meal (Beneficiaries). Food preserved by exposure to radiation has been a staple of the space program for years, and since the 50's American soldiers have been consuming irradiated foods (Beneficiaries). But the commercial food industry has avoided it, turned off by the high costs and the public relations problem of using radiation to preserve edibles (Disadvantage). Until recently, the biggest civilian use of irradiation has been to sterilize medical supplies, spices, and even rawhide doggie bones (Application).

This radiation technology plant is typical. Material to be treated is stacked in containers, then runs around a track inside a concrete block structure containing rods of radioactive cobalt (Process) Until now it has been a small industry dominated by a handful of companies. That is about to change. The Food and Drug Administration (Agent) has now approved the use of irradiation (Decision) to kill the micro-organisms that cause trichinosis in pork (Application) and it has approved similar treatment to kill insects and extend the shelf-life of fruits and vegetables (Application).

The man who has led the fight for this bureaucratic breakthrough is Dr. Martin Welt, a scientist, entrepreneur and irradiation enthusiast who thinks this is just the beginning (Pro). "If the FDA approved pork, how are they not going to approve beef? How are they not going to approve fish? (Potential Decision/Application). The FDA has now agreed with us and with other experts in that particular point. In fact, I will tell you that the whole attitude of the FDA has changed. There is nobody I can identify in the FDA today who is against food irradiation." (Pro) But if the FDA is convinced of the benefits of irradiation, its press releases now avoid the use of the word, substituting a new one picowave.

(Woman being interviewed) "Picowave? I don't even know what it means. That's what I think about it."

(Another woman being interviewed) "I don't feel good about it at all. At all" (Con).

The FDA has answered the complaints of consumer groups (Con) by ordering food exposed to irradiation to be labeled with this international symbol for irradiation. Dr. Welt doesn't mind this label. "We'll advertise that symbol as being a symbol of quality just as we do on carrots and other types of vegetables that we might be manufacturing, so the consumer will know if the food was irradiated. If they don't want to have irradiated food, they'll see that symbol and they won't buy that food." If, indeed, the public accepts picowaving or irradiation, Welt's publicly owned company is positioned to cash in (Advantage).

(Welt) "We can move out 2.4 billion pounds a year, which is roughly one half of what I estimate the market for...(inaudible)" (Advantage). That kind of massive use of irradiation alarms consumer groups who fear side effects from radiation and danger from the spread of such facilities (Disadvantage/Con). Users of irradiation say it has been tested more than any other form of food preservation (Advantage/Pro). Pioneers like Dr. Welt think it's a technology whose time has come. "Absolutely, there will be an industry called Food Irradiation and there's no question in my mind when they write the history of the Twentieth Century, food irradiation will be considered one of the major technological advances" (Advantage).

But first the food industry has to believe that irradiation is good business and the consumer has to be convinced that picowaving is good for him (Disadvantage/Con). Even after thirty years of study there are many unknowns about irradiation (Disadvantage). The safety debate centers on a side effect, the creation of the new chemical substances called "unique radiolytic products" or, you'll forgive me, "urps." Opponents say there are too many unanswered questions to allow widespread treatment of foods with irradiation (Disadvantage/Con).

(Unofficial transcript of Wall Street Journal Report, segment January 12, 1986. Reproduced by permission of R. Townley, producer.)